

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000154

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR, NSC FOR SHANNON AND MADISON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [DR](#)

SUBJECT: FERNANDEZ INAUGURATES NEW DOMINICAN SUPREME COURT BUILDING; SPEAKS OUT ON CRIME

1. SUMMARY. On January 5, President Leonel Fernandez inaugurated the new building that will house the Supreme Court, Attorney General's office, and related activities. Fernandez used the occasion to speak out on the need for an honest and fair judiciary as an integral part of the fight against crime, drugs, and corruption. He also defended the new Criminal Procedures Code, arguing that a recent rise in crime should be blamed on an increase on international narco-trafficking elements, rather than on the additional protections of Constitutional rights afforded by the code. END SUMMARY.

2. On January 5, President Leonel Fernandez presided over the inauguration of the new \$34 million, 30,000 square meter steel and glass building that will house the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's office, and other related activities. Construction began during Fernandez's first term (1996-2000), but stopped during the intervening Mejia administration. When Fernandez returned to power, he made it a priority to finish the project, which was completed less than five months into his tenure.

3. All three speakers at the inauguration -- Fernandez, Chief Justice Jorge Subero Isa, and Attorney General Francisco Dominguez Brito -- paid tribute to the beauty of the new building, but stressed its function in the effort to reform and modernize the entire judicial system. Fernandez, in particular, used the occasion to emphasize the urgent need for an independent, efficient, and fair judiciary in order to fight persistent problems of crime, drugs, and corruption. He made a plea to all judges in the nation to be impartial and independent, saying, "I believe that this is still the path that we must travel." He hoped that the new building would represent a new beginning in the reform of the justice system, allowing the Dominican Republic "to form an adequate, institutional response to the problem of crime."

4. Fernandez also made a strong and impassioned defense of the new Criminal Procedures Code (implemented in September), which has been criticized by some for being too lenient on criminals and the accused. He referred to the code as "no more than the first expression of the process of reform," and said that the recent rise in crime is not related to the additional protections of citizen rights provided by the Code, but rather is "a direct result of transnational narco-trafficking, which is a perverse element of globalization." Fernandez said that the new code was a large step forward in respect for human rights and guarantees of the individual liberties established in the Constitution. KUBISKE